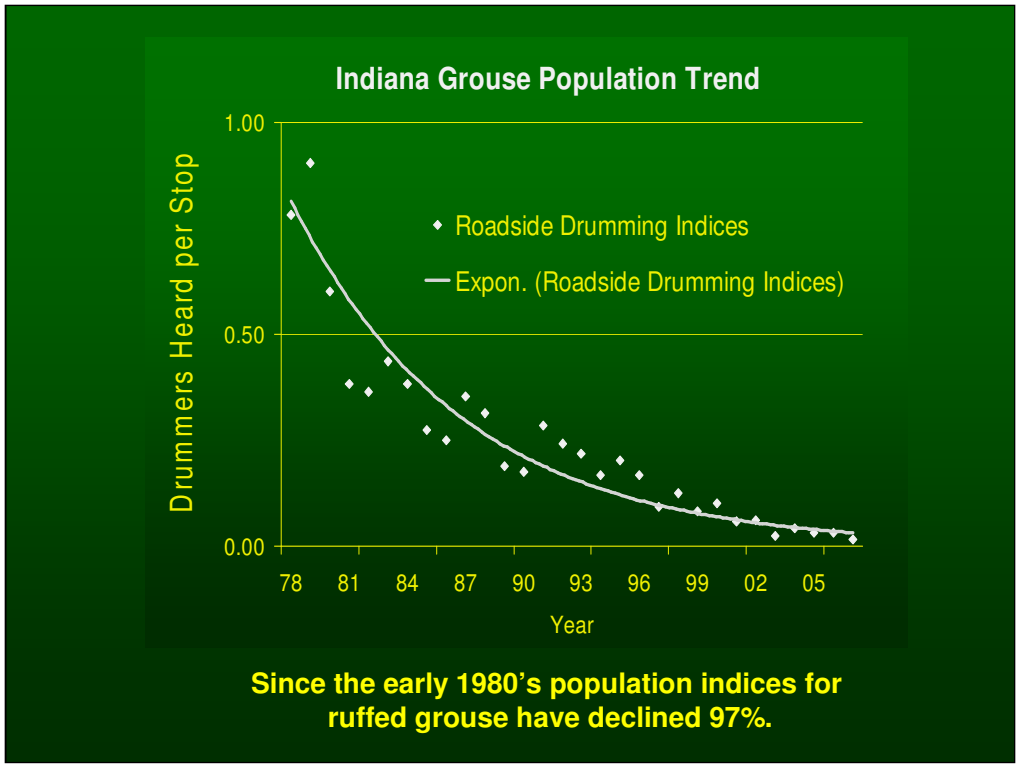
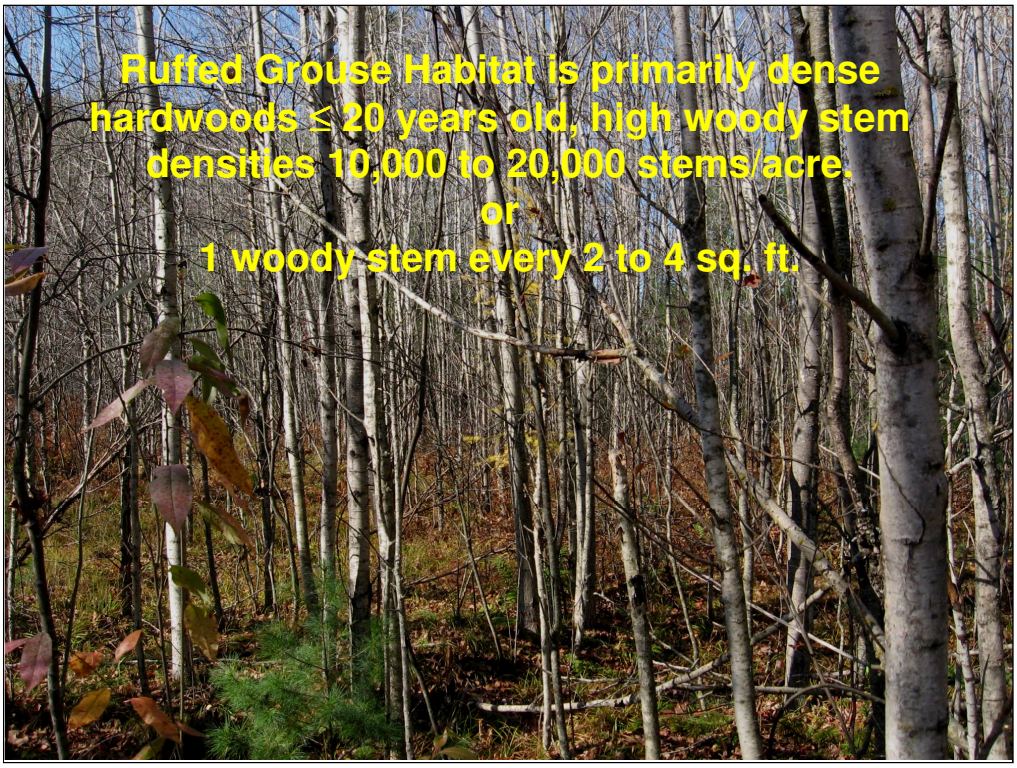
Ruffed Grouse Hunting

- Grouse population levels dependent on “young forest” habitats.
- Grouse populations have declined 97% due to advancing forest succession.
- Habitat decline impacting other wildlife too.
- Proposal reduces potential impact on potential breeding stock.
- Retains incentive for habitat management on private lands.



Since the early 1980's population indices for ruffed grouse have declined 97%.



Ruffed grouse are dependent on early succession or young forest habitats with high woody stem densities that follow some type of disturbance of either natural or human origin. When extensive forests covered most of Indiana, the combined natural forces of wind, fire, catastrophic flooding, and massive forest insect or tree disease outbreaks provided a consistent replenishing of young forest habitats across the forested landscape allowing ruffed grouse populations to shift with changing habitat conditions. In today's altered landscape of limited contiguous forest cover, ruffed grouse now primarily rely on man made forest disturbances or changing land-use.

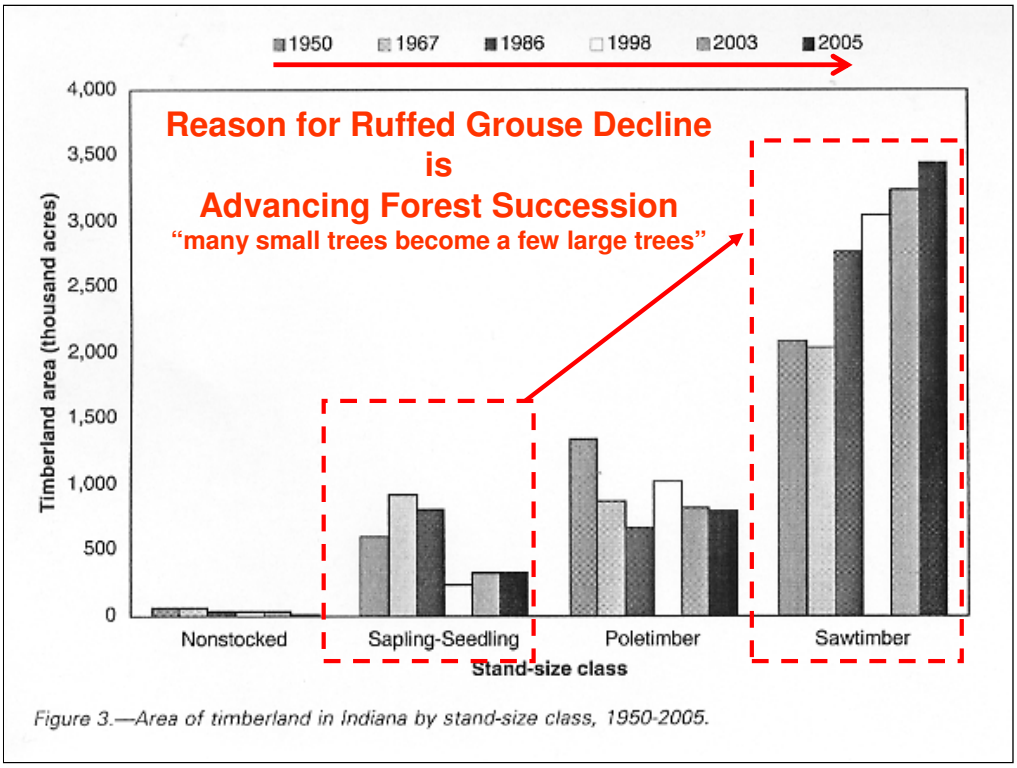
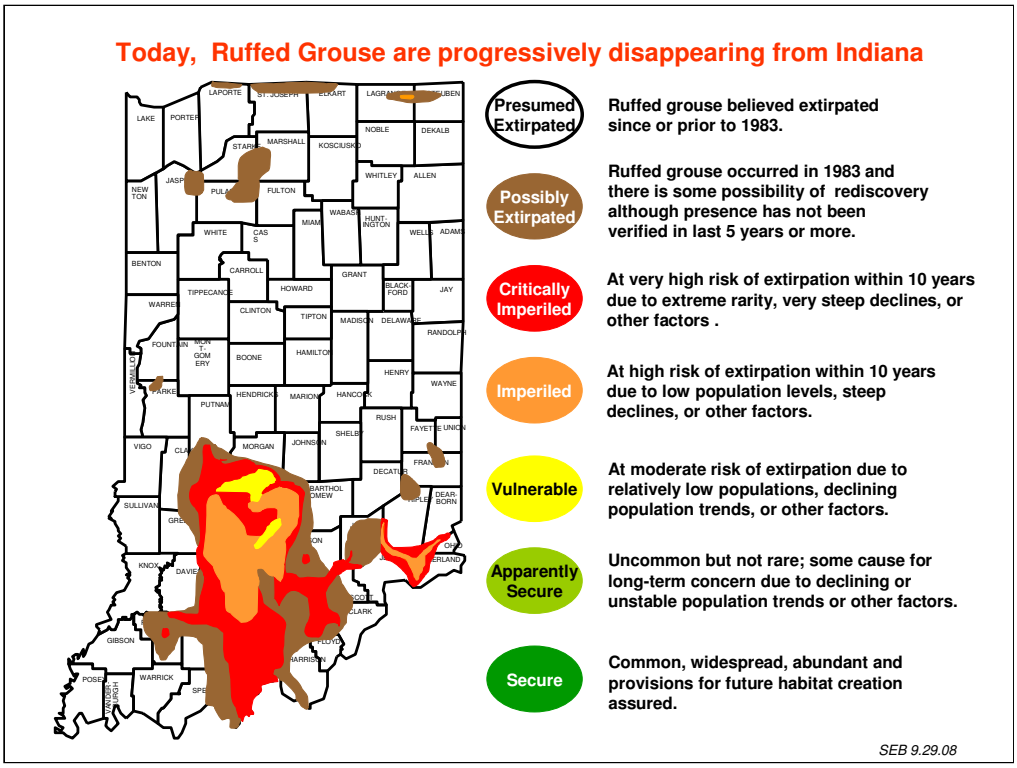


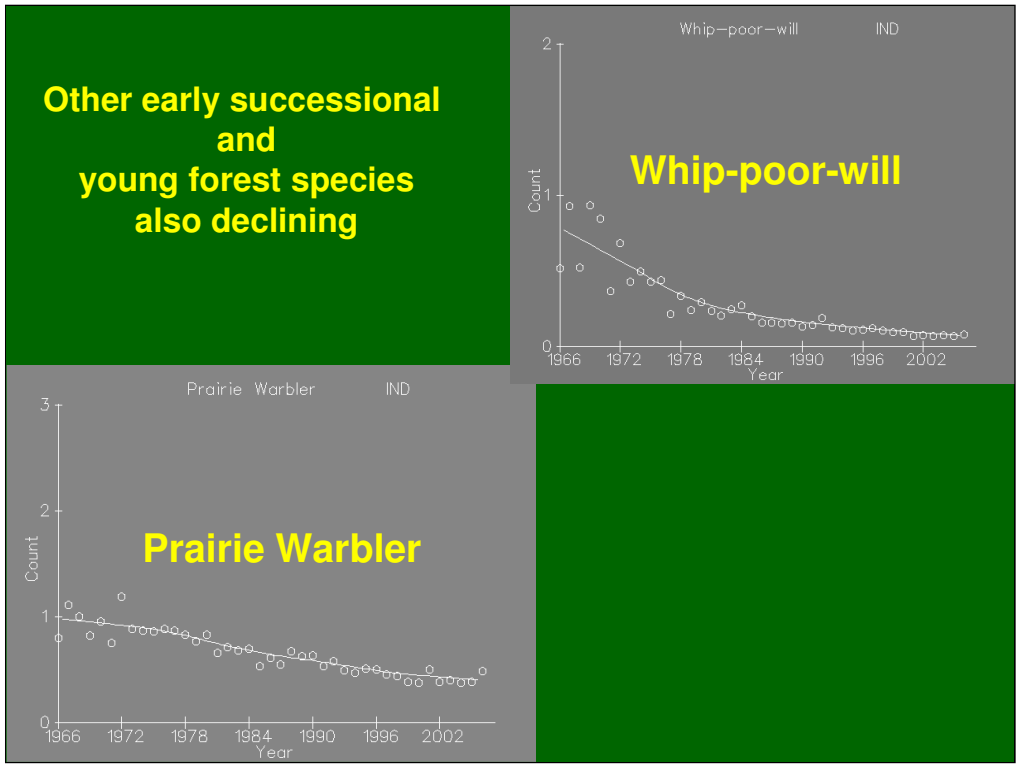
Figure 3.—Area of timberland in Indiana by stand-size class, 1950-2005.

Advancing Forest Succession is a process where "many small trees progressively develop into fewer large trees" of the more open mature forests.

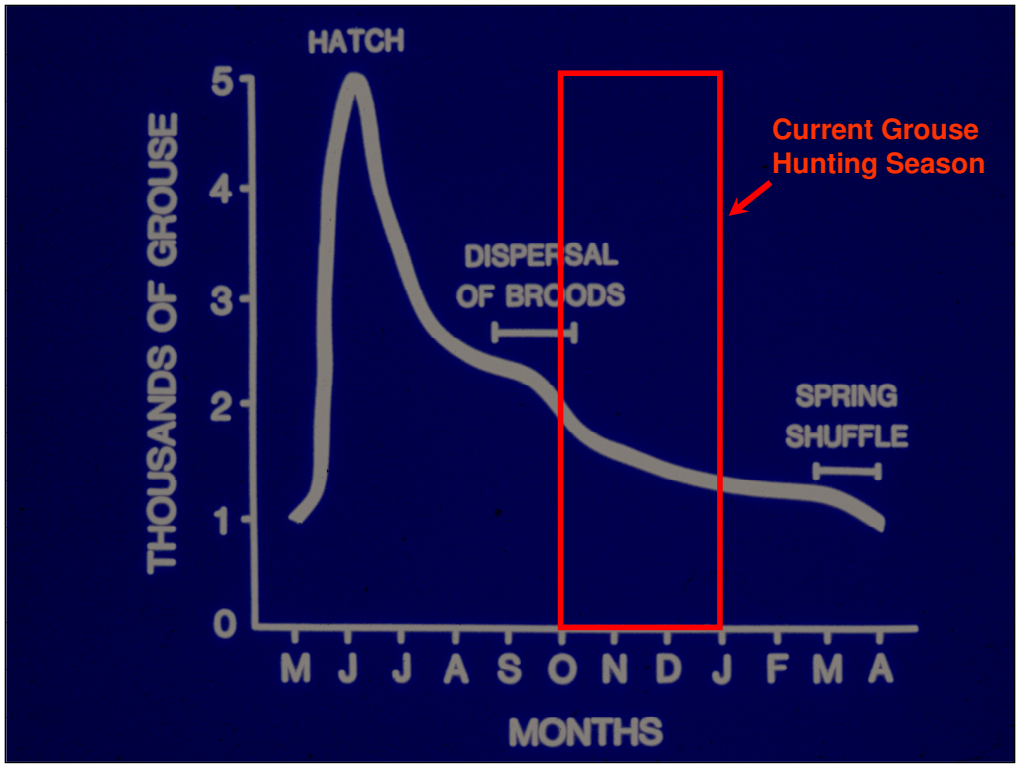
Ruffed grouse populations have declined because of advancing forest succession that has shifted the composition of the forests to older age classes. Young hardwood forest habitats have decreased to a very small proportion of the forest cover over the last 35 years and this is directly related to the decline of ruffed grouse and other wildlife associated with early sucessional habitats.

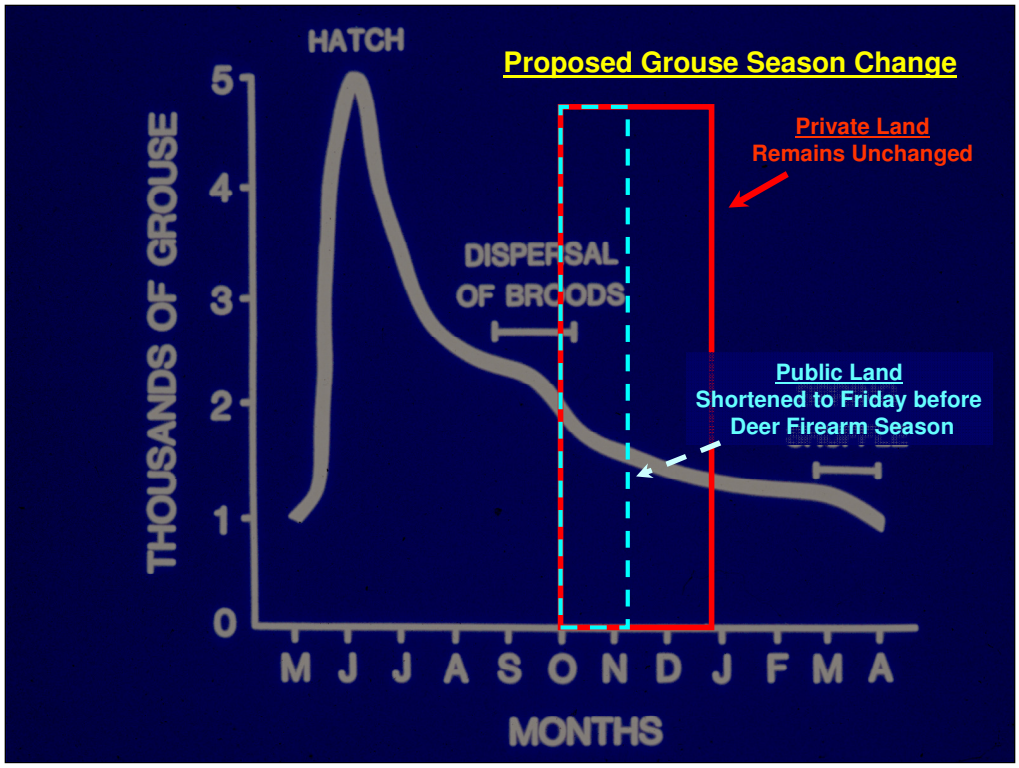


Today, ruffed grouse are likely extirpated from the northern 2/3rds of the state except for very restricted, critically imperiled populations in LaGrange County. Most existing populations in south central Indiana are considered imperiled. The best populations, listed as vulnerable, exist only where wind events in the last 10-15 years followed by salvage cutting created habitat. No secure populations are noted in green. Extirpation has occurred on the periphery of the 1983 distribution and it is highly probable that grouse have become extirpated from 15 counties since 1983. It is likely to exceed 25 counties within a few years if no major forest disturbance occurs.



Examples of other early successional or young forest birds undergoing declines are the whip-poor-will and the Prairie warbler. Both are migratory and that allows them to more easily colonize new habitats compared to the non migratory ruffed grouse. There are also a number of other birds, mammals, and invertebrate populations that are associated with early successional habitats that have declined too.


HATCH
THOUSANDS OF GROUSE
5
4
3
2
1
0
DISPERSAL
OF BROODS
SPRING
SHUFFLE
Current Grouse
Hunting Season
M J J A S O N D J F M A
MONTHS


Proposed Grouse Season Change
HATCH
Private Land
Remains Unchanged
DISPERSAL
OF BROODS
Public Land
Shortened to Friday before
Deer Firearm Season
THOUSANDS OF GROUSE
5
4
3
2
1
0
M J J A S O N D J F M A
MONTHS

Fall Turkey Seasons

Implemented in 2005

Conservative Season Structure

4- Year Evaluation Completed

Harvests and Hunter Participation low

Relative Harvest Levels Low

Hunter Success Low

No impact on Spring Harvests

Room for Range Expansion

Room to Increase Days of Opportunity

Fall Turkey Harvests

2005	2006	2007	2008
716	646	585	610

General Chronology of Harvests

20-25% During Archery only portion
75-80% 5-day combined Archery & Firearm (shotgun)
45-50% All weekends
35-40% Last weekend (combined archery and firearm)

Estimated Hunter Success

Archery Equipment < 2%
Firearms (shotguns) < 6%

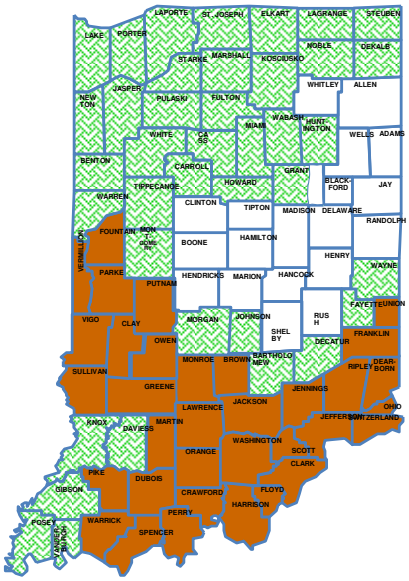
Proportion of Fall to Spring Harvest

Statewide: Fall harvest total ≤ 7% of Spring harvest.
Theoretical Allowable: 50%

Harvest Permit Types

Majority (72%) taken by lifetime, youth, & exempt permitees.

Current Fall Turkey Hunting Range & Days of Opportunity

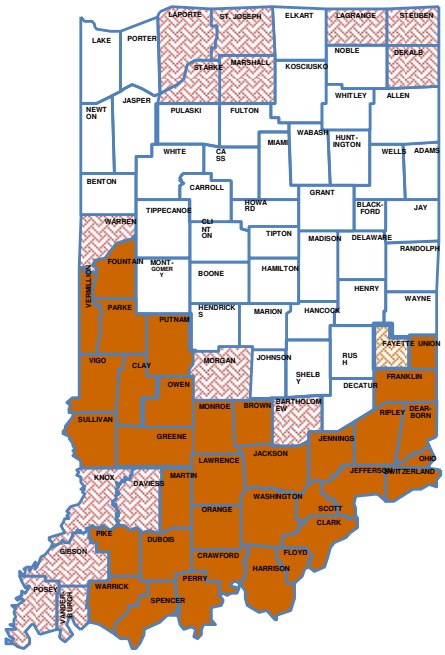


Fall Archery
~ 20 days

Spring Hunting Only

Both Archery & Gun
5 days

Proposed New Fall Turkey Hunting Range



New Firearm
Fall 2010

Adds 16 counties to Fall Firearms portion.
(7 north & 9 south)

Archery Statewide
Fall 2010

Expands Archery Statewide
from current 73 to all 92 counties

Current Firearm

Proposed 2010 Fall Turkey Hunting Range
Dates for Archery and Firearm (shotgun) portions

North Firearm

Retains current 5-day format

10/20 to10/24

Archery (Statewide)

Two Separate Portions
(~ 60 days total)

10/1 to 10/31
12/4 to 1/2/2011

South Firearm
Extends current 5-day format to 12 days
10/20 to 10/31